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ABSTRACT

The Family Literacy Project seeks to improve the prospects for adolescent parents and their children by working with student parents while they are still enrolled in school, supporting their efforts toward completion of their high school diplomas through literacy activities which enhance their skill as parents. The Family Literacy Project represents an action research model: it addresses substantive research issues about the development of literacy and parenting skills of adolescent parents. The project was implemented at five New York City high schools in 1991-92, and two additional high schools and a residential center for homeless women and children were added for 1992-93. The project: (1) sponsors a credit-bearing course, "Children's Literature," which is offered each semester at participating high schools; (2) establishes a permanent collection of children's literature at each participating school; and (3) offers staff development each summer and throughout the school year. Participants have shown improved attitudes toward reading, enhanced writing fluency, increased awareness of children's changing developmental needs, and clear preferences for certain specific books as well as certain types of books. Overall response to staff development has been positive. (A course outline; a 12-item annotated bibliography of works on folklore, the folktale, and performance; an issue of the project's newsletter; a 21-item list of selected readings on family; and a 15-item list of selected readings on fairy and folk tales are attached.) (RS)

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The Family Literacy Project: Using children's literature to enhance the literacy of adolescent parents

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The Family Literacy Project:
Using children's literature
to enhance the literacy of adolescent parents

The Family Literacy Project seeks to improve the prospects for adolescent parents and their children by working with student parents while they are still enrolled in school, supporting their efforts toward completion of their high school diplomas through literacy activities which enhance their skill as parents at the same time. **The Project** seeks to maximize its impact by piggybacking onto the New York City Board of Education's existing program for adolescent parents (LYFE), which provides on-site childcare and counseling services. **The Family Literacy Project** represents an action research model: it addresses substantive research issues about the development of literacy and parenting skills of adolescent parents within the context of a school-based program for these students.

After a successful pilot project in one high school in 1990, **The Family Literacy Project** was implemented at five New York City high schools in 1991-1992. Two additional high schools and one residential center for homeless women and children have been added to the **Project** for 1992-1993. Each participating site identifies one English teacher and one member of the school's LYFE staff to serve as the **Project** team.

Project Description

Project staff have worked closely with the faculty team from each school to tailor **The Project** to the structure and needs of each school. The graduate assistants visit the schools weekly to provide support and to observe activities. **The Family Literacy Project** comprises three basic components: an English course, a book collection, and a program of staff development.

The Course. **The Family Literacy Project** sponsors a credit-bearing course, "Children's Literature," which is offered each semester at participating high schools. In the class, students are immersed in children's literature: they read and discuss many books. Journal writing and other process activities are an integral part of the class. In addition, students are required to read regularly to young children and to reflect and write about these reading experiences. Students who do not have a child of their own must "adopt" one for these ongoing

reading assignments. In this way, students become involved in literacy as a shared activity. Experiences reading to children in elementary school are also arranged to promote work with more advanced books. The feedback received during these shared reading experiences motivates adolescent parents to read more on their own (see comment below).

The Book Collection. At each participating school, **The Family Literacy Project** establishes a permanent collection of children's literature that includes classics and selections from the Newberry and Caldecott Medal lists, as well as books representing the experiences of adolescents and of different ethnic groups. After the pilot project, the book collection was expanded to include more young adult books in response to many students who remarked "I'd like to read some books for myself now.

The Staff Development Program. Each summer, the co-directors organize a series of training workshops for the **Project** faculty teams, who receive stipends for participating. The workshops include presentations by outside consultants and cover many topics, including language and child development, writing process activities, ways of using children's literature in the classroom, and storytelling. The curriculum for the **Project** course is discussed and revised.

The staff development component continues during the school year, through Saturday morning workshops held roughly once every eight weeks. These meetings, for which participants also receive stipends, include presentations by outside consultants on topics in which the group has expressed interest. The meetings also enable the faculty teams to share information about classroom activities and strategies.

Research Issues

Each of the components of **The Family Literacy Project** generates a distinct set of research issues.

The Course. Since the inception of the **Project**, pre- and post- measures of reading comprehension, writing fluency, and knowledge of child development have been administered to all **Project** participants. The data show improved attitudes toward reading, enhanced writing fluency, and increased awareness of children's changing developmental needs. However, in order to more systematically evaluate the impact of **Project** participation, we have expanded the 1992-1993 documentation

of Project effects in three ways. First, in addition to the pre- and post-testing of Project participants, all assessments are now being administered to a comparison group of student parents at each school who are not participating in the Project. Second, we are monitoring students' overall school performance by recording the number of unexcused absences, the number of credits attempted, the number of credits completed, whether or not the student has a child, and the student's grade point average at the end of each semester. (To protect confidentiality, all data is being recorded by student identification number rather than name.) Third, we are implementing a holistic scoring of student writing samples to more adequately assess the quality of student writing and organizational skills.

The Book Collection. The response of Project participants to the book collection has revealed clear preferences for certain specific books as well as certain types of books in this student population. The Project teachers have also had to adjust to books which are quite different from those typically used in high school classrooms. To systematize some of this information, we have documented the frequency with which each book in the collection has been selected, as well as the overall number of books read by individual students.

The Staff Development Program. While the overall response to the staff development workshops has been positive, we are currently evaluating the extent to which the faculty teams actually incorporate workshop materials and activities into their work with students. A structured interview assessing each team's view of the Project in relation to their work will also be administered.

The Family Literacy Project provides data about enhancing the literacy of adolescent parents as well as about how best to prepare teachers to work with this population. This type of action research model is especially valuable for teacher educators seeking to address the needs of our changing student population.

Family Literacy

Course: Children's Literature

Themes and Structures

Introduction to Course Outline

The following material forms a general outline of the thinking that emerged during and after the summer workshops. We expect certain commonalities in all the schools, including the immersion of students in books, the use of journals for students to use in connection with the reading, the culminating project by all the students of written work for children, the inclusion of student observation and LYFE staff to provide background material for your students as indicated below, and following the themes and structures outlined. In addition, we expect you to complete all pre- and post-tests and to keep track of the readership of each book.

The suggestions here about the use of class time, arrangements for observations, class activities, and the topics for focus are true suggestions.

Class Organization

The classes need to include time for the return, selection, and signing out of books. To make sure to use class time efficiently, thought needs to be given to these processes. We suggest that each student sign out on two available cards when books are borrowed - one a revolving file of books and one a file of students, both listed alphabetically. When books are returned, students check each item at the beginning of class and sign cards at the end of class.

There will be a lot of journal writing. If students read the books at home, it may be that you will have the writing completed in class. There needs to be time for class activities around the books, the topics of the themes, and the discussions based on observations. Therefore, you may want to have a certain amount of time for journal writing every day or you may, instead want to designate time during two or three classes a week for writing.

Some Generic Activities

- Teacher reads to students: It is appropriate to select a central book in the list of suggested titles and read to the class, and in discussion point out how to analyze characters, conflict, etc. as well as how to think about quality and

appeal to children.

- Two or three selected books required of each student during each unit or theme-based study with small group discussions around specified questions: These commonly read books then become the focus of small-group discussions and activities.
- Students develop alternative, perhaps more realistic endings for books: They can simply describe orally how they might alter the ending. They can read only to a certain point in class, get together and plan and ending, and compare their ending with the actual book.
- Students share selected journal responses with others: It may be a good idea to have students in pairs regularly share selections from journals.
- Book circles - students promote a particular book to others: This makes sense if some students are having difficulty in finding books they enjoy.
- Ways to read to young children - discussion, advice, successes: During one of the visits from the LYFE staff, you might encourage students to ask about good ways to read to students. In the discussion, it is important to stress that students must prepare book before reading to child. They should think about ways to sit with child, how to respond to questions by child, when to stop reading, ways to think about why a particular book was not appealing to child.
- Collection of comments on "best books": An on-going record of preferred books may stimulate those less comfortable.
- Two or three students critique a book read in common and present to two or three others
- Students identify ways in which books are illustrated: This may involve identifying the art form used, the relationship between story content and illustration, the success of the illustration to capture child interest, how children actually respond to different forms.
- Students identify best ages for books read
- Favorite authors

Structure

Based on the experiences with the program to date, the discussions held, and the thinking behind the program, four major themes are suggested for the semester: Family; Growing Up; Folktales and Fairytales; Writing and Publishing. These each include several subtopics including those felt to be important to adolescents and very much a part of children's literature.

Family

Rationale: Adolescent students struggle with their place in their families, themselves in relationship to parents and other members of family. Some must combine this struggle with viewing themselves as parents, with responsibilities they may or may not understand. Family conflict is nearly inevitable to adolescents. Issues around siblings arise and add to the complexities they experience. Students must balance the stereotypic notions of what constitutes "normal" family composition with the variety we all know. Therefore, the definition of family emerges as important.

Unit Concepts:

- Family as seen by child; family as seen by parents
- Family members' roles
- Conflict, resolution and understanding
- Definition of family - not based on who is in house, but roles and feelings
- Siblings

Sub-themes:

- The Naughty Child: Humor, fantasy, control, resolution
- Siblings: Problems, resources
- Family composition: Variety
- Celebrations: Alternatives

Activities:

- Students trace their own "family" structure, using materials based on Bonfrenbrenner's concept of expanding circles; activity involves student family, is not intrusive and enables students to begin thinking about a broad definition of "family".
- Students who have read in a particular sub-theme summarize the issues raised in book: The students may write a list of issues, questions they had, or kinds of resolutions found in the book.
- Students define "family": Toward the end of the focus on family, students may want to discuss as a whole class what they have found in the books which respond to the issues such as those listed above in Unit Concepts.
- Students read "naughty kid" books, discuss the episodes, identify how adults responded to the episodes, critique the adult responses, plot out a new "naughty kid" story.
- Teacher reads a "naughty kid" story through the naughty behavior and asks students to write either how the adult should react or how they think the adult will react.

- Students read a "naughty kid" book in common and write a description of the same episode from the point of view of the adult.
- Siblings: Students read and discuss sibling rivalry, their own experiences and from their reading.
- Students, after identifying what are the roles and feelings in families, locate these roles in stories among characters not of the same family. In this way they begin to see how children can obtain some experiences from others that they may not have in their own family.
- Students discuss and identify what are children's needs from books. For example, security, food, shelter, safety, etc.
- Students compare needs children have at different ages.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT FOLKLORE, THE FOLKTALE, AND PERFORMANCE DABBLE IN THESE. STARRED ARE MUST READS.

Bauman, Richard. VERBAL ART AS PERFORMANCE. Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1977. Theoretical. Seminal.

Dundes, Alan. THE STUDY OF FOLKLORE. Prentice-Hall, 1965. Selectad readings on a wide range of folkloric topics.

Fine, Elizabeth C. THE FOLKLORE TEXT: FROM PERFORMANCE TO PRINT. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984. Highly theoretical. 244 page analysis of one Stagolee text.

Gastner, Theodor H. THE OLDEST STORIES IN THE WORLD. Boston: Beacon, 1952. Translated from cuneiform texts. Babylonian, Hititte, and Canaanite stories.

*Glassie, Henry. PASSING THE TIME IN BALLYMENONE. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1982. Subtitle: CULTURE AND HISTORY OF AN ULSTER COMMUNITY. Do not fail to get this book in your hands and dabble in its rewarding prose. A must read for anyone wishing to understand the possibilities opened by examining a culture through its folklore.

Roberts, Leonard. SANG BRANCH SETTLERS: FOLKSONGS AND TALES OF A KENTUCKY MOUNTAIN FAMILY. Pikeville, Kentucky: Pikeville College Press, 1980. Songs, stories, and family stories. Tellers who use Richard Chase should see this and Roberts' other titles.

Rothenberg, Jerome & Diane Rothenberg. SYMPOSIUM OF THE WHOLE: A RANGE OF DISCOURSE TOWARD AN ETHNOPOETICS. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983. Collection of articles on the problems of translating performance into text, and the discovery of poetry in ethnic narrative. Highly theoretical.

Seitel, Peter. SEE SO THAT WE MAY SEE: PERFORMANCES AND INTERPRETATIONS OF TRADITIONAL TALES FROM TANZANIA. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980. Cultural explication, performance notes, and ethnopoetic texts.

Tedlock, Dennis. FINDING THE CENTER: NARRATIVE POETRY OF THE ZUNI INDIANS. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1972. Excellent ethnopoetic texts.

Tedlock, Dennis. THE SPOKEN WORD AND THE WORK OF INTERPRETATION. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983. More ethnopoetic texts + theoretical articles on texts and tellers.

*Toelken, Barre. THE DYNAMICS OF FOLKLORE. Houghton Mifflin, 1979. Must read overview of the field. Exciting bibliographies point to further reading.

Family Literacy

Volume 1 Issue 1 Fall 1993

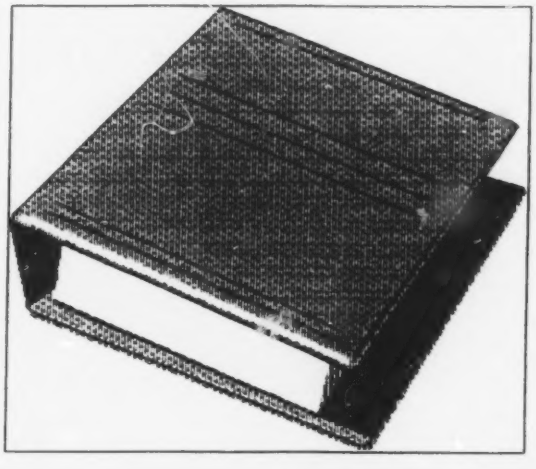
[illegible] high school

Through the efforts of Harriet, Steve and Rikki, the students in The Family Literacy Program have the benefit of a well-rounded exploration in literacy, as we are defining literacy. The central concept story used was IF BEALE STREET COULD TALK by James Baldwin. The story is about a young girl who becomes pregnant by her boyfriend who is later imprisoned, their relationship through this ordeal, her support system, and the circular relationship she is involved in during her pregnancy.

Using readings which relate to the student's experiences, Harriet and Steve had the students recall their own memories of their neighborhood, school, family and church.

Rikki, the art teacher, focused the students on their own neighborhoods presenting them as they are or they would like it to be. The drawings and the writings which accompanied them frame the corridors of the school, depicting the reality of the student's life or their dreams.

Every Friday, the students visit a neighboring elementary school to read to first graders for one half hour. In order to familiarize themselves with the words and storylines, the students select the books appropriate for the children the day before. For the final project the team invited the author Riki Levinson, who wrote WATCH THE STARS COME OUT and many other children's books, to speak to the students on cloth bookmaking, how an idea develops into a book. In addition Rikki coordinated with Anna Polowski, who contributed her time and materials to the students in a bookmaking workshop. The final project are beautiful cloth children's books.



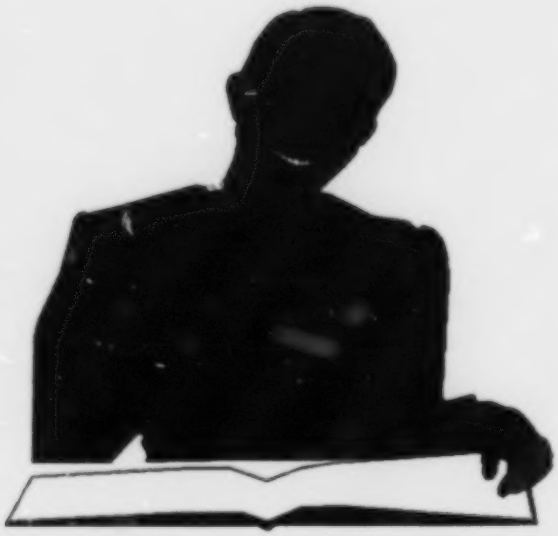
West End Intergenerational

Sonia Deane-Williams, Bob Nachimson, along with the GED Teacher, Irene Schrier have just completed the unit on "The Family." No matter what books have been read or discussed, Inevitably the topics turn into discussions about children and parenting. A stimulating discussion about " children sharing" sparked varied views about the propers (street name for "just dues") of parenting intervention. During a critique of the story, BABY SISTER FOR FRANCES, The students keyed in on each other's ways of handling their children's sharing of toys. The views were varied. One popular view expressed was that, I always had to share my stuff with my younger sister no matter what. My baby doesn't have to share it if she doesn't want to. I buy her enough toys so she doesn't have to share. If I have to, I'll put her things away when she has company over!

Sonia has planned for James Ransome, a famed illustrator, to come in to take the students through the process of book development for their final project. The students are now examining the unit on "friendship," and preparing to begin their reading projects with a neighboring elementary school.

Springfield Gardens High School

Theresa Scheck, brought a child to Ellen Jacob's classroom to demonstrate different methods used in reading to children. She read, interacted with the child and explained to the young parents that children may not always want to be read to when you're ready to read to them. The visit helped to reduce the student apprehension about future reading experiences with young children.



Middle College High School

Monica Vecchio's students critique authors. Student groups choose several books by the same author. They evaluate the language, story, and appearance of each book. A 4-star rating system is used and the results are posted for consideration in choosing books to read.

Monica also has two students read the same book. They then have an in-class discussion of the story line, whether they liked or disliked the book (and why), and the message or lesson learned.

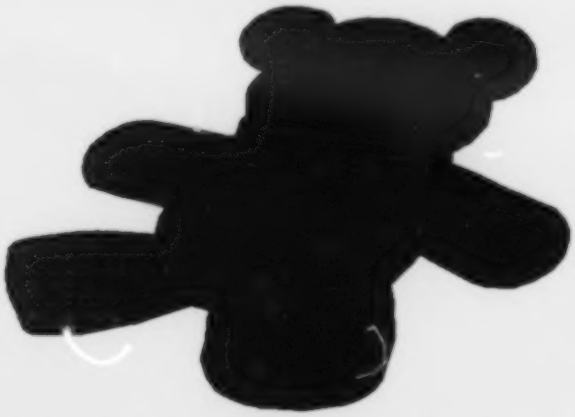
Articles and pictures from Sesame Street magazine are posted around the room. Student write-ups, "Lessons To Be Learned" accompany the magazine pages (i.e. numbers, letters, shape, colors).

Oscar Sarasky's Family Literature class used films to study family relationships from an immigrant viewpoint. The students saw several films including PELE THE CONQUEROR and EL SUPER. Students also made children's books with the assistance of Lynn Yammotto from the P.S. 1 Art Program.

Redirection High School

Grace Monahan's students have been reading to the children in the LYFE Center since the end of October. The first group of students came to class feeling quite out of sorts because the children appeared to have no interest in interactive reading. However, students reported that one child did come over, sit, and enjoy the story. When asked which child had participated, they found that it was the daughter of a classmate who had started reading only a few weeks before.

The other mothers then became excited about reading to their own children. Grace had a class discussion on how to handled certain family situations. Students shared their solutions to each problem and the class then discussed advantages and disadvantages of each alternative.



Sally O' Connell's observation of a student's first reading experience in the LYFE Center at High School Redirection.

She waited patiently outside the room with two books she had selected. She tapped her foot, moved from side to side, she cleared her throat. She was very anxious. She began practicing as she waited... nervously looking around. She wondered if they will listen to me? Will they understand the book that I Have selected to read to them? Will they bite me? Will they laugh? Will they run away? Suppose...

The time came. She entered the room and sat on the floor with her two books. A small boy immediately came over to her and stood watching. she opened the book. He stood watching. She opened up her arms and he jumped into her lap.

As she read, the little boy laughed. He pointed to the pictures and laughed some more. She read, he listened. They talked.

"I'll see you next week." She beamed at the small boy. He smiled and gave her a big hug. What a great experience!

The Family Literacy Project

Selected Readings: Fairy and Folk Tales

Aardema	Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain Princess Gorilla and a New Kind of Water Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears
Aesop	Lion and the Mouse
Anderson	Emperor's New Clothes
Brown	Stone Soup
DePaola	Tomie DePaola's Favorite Nursery Tales
Galdone	Three Billy Goats Gruff Three Little Pigs
Goldberg	Alice
Lobel	Mouse Tales
Mosel	Tikki Tikki Tembo
Peet	Ant and the Elephant
Scieszka & Smith	The Stinky Cheese Man
Shute	Momotaro the Peach Boy
Steptoe	Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters
Wildsmith	Mother Goose
Wolkstein	Banza

The Family Literacy Project

Selected Readings: The Family

Angelou	I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings
Brown	The Runaway Bunny
Christiansen	My Mother's House, My Father's House
Cisneros	The House on Mango Street
Clifton	Everett Anderson's Nine Month Long Everett Anderson's Goodbye
DePaola	Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs Strega Nona
Eastman	Are You My Mother
Freeman	Corduroy
Hoban	Baby Sister for Frances
Jenness	Families: A Celebration of Diversity
Johnson	Tell Me a Story Mama When I Am Old with You
Keats	Peter's Chair
Kellogg	Much Bigger than Martin
Kunhardt	Pat the Bunny
MacLachan	Sarah Plain & Tall
MacLachlan	Through Grandpa's Eyes
Mohr	Felita Going Home
Oxenbury	Family
Seuss	Horton Hatches the Egg
Simon	All Kinds of Families
Williams	A Chair for My Mother